Uncommon Sense:
Promising Practices in Urban Aboriginal Policy-Making and Programming

Calvin Hanselmann
Senior Policy Analyst
Canada West Foundation

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This report is the third instalment of the Canada West Foundation's two-year *Urban Aboriginal Initiative*, being conducted under the auspices of the larger three-year *Western Cities Project*. The initiative identifies key policy areas, explores policy options and alternatives, highlights promising practice ideas, and promotes dialogue about urban Aboriginal issues. In so doing, the Canada West Foundation will increase public awareness of those issues and encourage constructive public policy debate. To meet these objectives, the Urban Aboriginal Initiative includes three components, each to be explored through a public policy lens.

Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada: Realities and Policies

- Comparison of urban Aboriginal people with non-Aboriginal urban dwellers on a number of statistical indicators.
- Overview of current federal, provincial and municipal policies for urban Aboriginal people in six major western Canadian cities.

Enhanced Urban Aboriginal Programming in Western Canada

- Overview of government and non-profit sector programs for Aboriginal people in six major western Canadian cities.
- Mapping of roles of various levels of government and non-profit sector.

Uncommon Sense: Promising Practices in Urban Aboriginal Policy-Making and Programming

- Identification of ideas that work in urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming.
- Discussion of lessons learned.

The final report, including policy and research recommendations, will be released in December 2002.

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INTRODUCTION

Urban Aboriginal issues have achieved a prominence on the agendas of governments, the media, and the public today that would scarcely have been imaginable two years ago. However, the heightened interest in and attention to urban Aboriginal issues have often not been matched by policy-making and programming successes (Hanselmann 2001; Hanselmann 2002).

For this reason, it is important that all actors engaged in urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming are provided with ideas that work and that can inform future initiatives. Therefore, it is timely to ask, "What are the good ideas that have emerged in urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming? As decision-makers contribute to making western Canadian cities dynamic, livable centres, what directions could their efforts take?"

This report is not intended to identify "best practices" – an often misleading term – but rather to identify *promising practices* in urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming. "Promising practices" is preferred over "best practices" because the term best practice "implies absolutism" (ARNet 2001) – even though what works in one specific situation may not necessarily be "best" in all circumstances. By contrast, promising practices are *ideas that work* and therefore have some potential for transferability: because they are ideas, they can be transmitted and adapted to meet various specific conditions.

The promising practices discussed in this report are important for decision-makers throughout Canada and internationally. As almost two-thirds of Canada's urban Aboriginal population resides in western Canada (Hanselmann 2001), this report is especially relevant for western Canadian cities. In addition, however, many of these ideas can be applied to any policy-making and programming sector, and their currency therefore extends well beyond Canada.

Some of the promising practices identified in this report could be described as "common sense." In this regard, two points must be remembered. First, many of these practices are anything but common. Second, sometimes, common sense can seemingly escape even decision-makers. By identifying promising practices, this report can help these ideas become more commonplace.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based largely on the results of key informant telephone and in-person interviews with people involved in urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming in six major western Canadian cities: Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Vancouver, and Winnipeg. Interviews were conducted with representatives of federal, provincial, and municipal governments, other local authorities (school boards and health districts), Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service delivery organizations, and Aboriginal political organizations. Interview subjects were chosen using the snowball method of non-probability sampling. A total of 109 people were interviewed (see Table 1) between February and July 2002.

Interviewees were asked to identify and discuss things – for example, policies, principles, committees, initiatives, agreements, guidelines, strategies, approaches, technologies, instructive resources, programs, and research – that seem to work for urban Aboriginal people, and why these things seem to work. Many of the in-person interviews occurred in the places where services are delivered. These site visits proved invaluable because they drew attention to the distinction between practice on paper and practice in practice. Information from the interviews was supplemented by documents provided by interview subjects and other organizations, and a review of relevant literature.

TABLE 1: Interview Subjects

	Vancouver	Calgary & Edmonton	Regina & Saskatoon	Winnipeg	TOTAL
Federal Government	2	1	2	15	20
Provincial Government	6	9	5	6	26
Municipal Government	1	6	5	2	14
Other Government*	0	3	2	0	5
Aboriginal Organizations	10	2	11	10	33
Non-Aboriginal Organizations	0	2	3	6	11
TOTAL	19	23	28	39	109

* NOTE: Other Government is comprised of school boards and health districts.

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The research sought a full spectrum of initiatives, including urban Aboriginal-specific, enhanced for urban Aboriginal people, initiatives of general application, and even public policy choices to do nothing. Public, private, non-profit, and informal sectors were researched, as were cross-sectoral initiatives. The data were distilled to their common themes to identify ideas that work and that can be applied to future policy-making and programming – i.e., promising practices.

Readers should be aware of two important points. First, a distinction is made in this report between public servants of Aboriginal identity speaking as members of urban Aboriginal communities and those speaking as public servants. Many of the public servants interviewed during the research were of Aboriginal identity. However, only if a public servant of Aboriginal identity said that she or he was speaking as a member of an urban Aboriginal community and not as a public servant, is that person referred to as an Aboriginal respondent in the text that follows.

Second, this report is based on qualitative research and does not attempt to evaluate specific programs or policies. Qualitative methods were chosen for two reasons. First, data upon which quantitative or evaluative research could be conducted generally do not, at present, exist. Second, qualitative methods were seen to be appropriate in the circumstances because they give voice to those best placed to give opinions on urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming – the people directly involved. Therefore, readers are cautioned that this report is based largely on the informed opinions of interview respondents.

The promising practices fall into two categories: those for all actors and those for governments. Because the focus is on ideas that work rather than "best practices", this report does not catalogue individual programs or policies, nor does it identify specific programs or policies as being good or bad. At first glance, some of the ideas identified in this report may seem to contradict each other or to be at cross-purposes. This is because not all of these ideas are applicable to every situation. It is for everyone involved in local situations to apply the relevant promising practices to the circumstances they face.

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR ALL ACTORS

1. Emphasizing and Building Social Capital

The importance of social capital to successful policy-making and programming came through time and again in the interviews. Social capital can be described as the trust, norms of reciprocity, and networks that facilitate coordinated actions (Putnam 1993: 167). Efforts by public servants to build social capital with urban Aboriginal communities are essential to successful relationships with the communities. This is especially true when the public servants are non-Aboriginal. In addition, many interviewees spoke of the importance of urban Aboriginal people needing to build social capital within their communities.

How do governments and urban Aboriginal communities build social capital? In the words of an Aboriginal respondent, the keys to building and maintaining social capital include "sharing the sandbox ... having the will to work together ... establishing trust ... [and] showing mutual respect." These sentiments were frequently echoed in the interviews; as a public servant observed, "What's key is developing relationships, building trust, and being a good partner."

- ***Establish and nurture relationships to build trust:*** Many respondents stressed the need to establish and nurture relationships before any successes could be attained; as a health district official said, trust is "a big, big factor." Good relationships between people lead to a level of trust in each other. According to a municipal official, "What worked was the level of trust among the four people who represented the four organizations." This trust, interviewees often stated, is a prerequisite to urban Aboriginal communities being willing to accept initiatives – even those undertaken by members of the Aboriginal community.

For example, interview subjects from all the partners in creating Saskatoon's White Buffalo Youth Lodge spoke of the importance of trust and relationship-building as keys to that success story – and to laying the foundation for future successes. Among those later successes is the Saskatoon Community Partnership Table, which works well because of the social capital that was established and built up during the earlier process of establishing the White Buffalo Youth Lodge.

■ ***Network and invest time:*** Part of building social capital is networks. A police officer related that the networking done by Aboriginal liaison officers meant that they "deal with the community not as police officers but as resources … [and] use it to build trust of the police." Another significant part of social capital-building is investing time getting to know each other in person; as a municipal official said, "face meetings are important…. It's best to sit and talk." Another municipal official stated that successful relationships require "lots of meetings," while a provincial official noted that these meetings must be "both formal and informal."

■ ***Take time:*** To many of the interviewees, establishing and building social capital requires time, and governments must accept that this will mean longer timelines and more complex processes. As an Aboriginal respondent summarized, "Relationships need to be built over time."

2. Cultivating the Right People

Many interview subjects spoke of success stories that came down to having the right people in the right place at the right time. To avoid having successful policy-making and programming being largely dependent on chance, all actors need to work to ensure that the right people are in the right places, all the time.

■ ***Champions:*** The importance of having key people supporting an initiative came through in numerous interviews. In the words of an Aboriginal respondent, "Champions – that's a must."

Interview subjects identified four types of champions. First, high level political support was mentioned as a key to many successes. According to a municipal official, there "has to be a political contact." A respondent from an Aboriginal political organization identified political support as being "very important," while a federal official said it was "critical" in his province. Support of this type is because the politician is "willing to look 10 years out, not just to the next election."

The influence of high-level political support can be seen, for example, in Alberta, where the former Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and the Premier were instrumental in Cabinet adoption of an *Aboriginal Policy Framework*. Subsequent Ministers have since been key to a cross-ministry *Aboriginal Policy Initiative* being developed, which currently directs department and agency activity relating to Aboriginal issues.

The second type of champion is a high-level administrative official. Senior officials are seen to be integral to successes for several reasons; as a municipal official stated, "Each carries his own weight…. Some push politicians, some do business plans," and so on. Administrative champions must be senior staff to be effective. According to a health district official, a key to their success was that the administrative staff people were "senior enough to have the ear of the leadership…. Senior enough to have the support of their organizations," while a municipal official stated that what is necessary is "people at the table at high enough levels to initiate change." Likewise, a provincial government interviewee stated that the people involved in discussions must be "in a position to tinker with budgets and policies."

The third type of champion is a person or organization (especially in the private sector) who recognizes urban Aboriginal people as an opportunity for the present and for the future. This person or organization acts to ensure the engagement of urban Aboriginal people in the labour force. In this regard, an Aboriginal person stated, "[Our Champions] represent a unified effort between high level Aboriginal and government officials and corporate CEOs working together to provide direction." Many examples of this type of champion exist in cities across western Canada.

Having champions within urban Aboriginal communities is seen as crucial to success. In this regard, interviewees spoke of the importance of leadership within communities, a fourth kind of champion. In the words of an Aboriginal respondent, "Leadership and teamwork are essential," as are conflict management skills – "being able to be frank, open, and as honest as possible to each other about issues. When we have disagreements, we are able to resolve it." Without healthy leadership within urban Aboriginal communities, a key ingredient is seen as missing.

■ ***Work peer-to-peer and mobilize at all levels:*** Another point with respect to cultivating the right people is for participants to interact with their peers from other organizations, and for organizations to mobilize at all levels in support of an initiative. In this respect, a municipal official said, "We worked administration

to administration…. We brief the mayor; the mayor speaks to the Chief…. We speak administration-to-administration and politician-to-politician…. You need to work bottom to top and top to bottom simultaneously."

■ ***Local people:*** A large factor in many successes is the presence of local people at the table. According to a municipal official, the presence of a local person means the person "understands issues from [a local] perspective and approaches the issue differently from the national approach…. Local issue, local approach…. The key thing is not dealing with someone from [regional headquarters]." A federal official echoed these sentiments, saying that a recent success occurred in part because the federal government "moved from regional reps to local managers and staff, meaning better relationships and local knowledge." A municipal official added, "People parachuted in, in the past, didn't work…. Local people know the local situation."

■ ***Focus on the future, not the past:*** The "right people" are those who focus on the future. A municipal official said that part of the success of the relationships built in his city was because the people at the table are "not harping on the past" but rather "bring an issue to the table…. Let the past go…. Look at the issue today and focus on the future." A federal official stated, "Rehashing the unfortunate past … is not very helpful to developing a relationship between Aboriginal people and public servants, who are also people who care for their fellow citizens." An Aboriginal respondent identified that much of the work in getting along with others is "overcoming past hurts and anger … mending fences … [and] building bridges."

Another way to focus on the future is to include youth in policy-making and programming. Among the many benefits of youth involvement are, in the words of a federal official, "pride and leadership development." Another federal official argues that youth involvement can lead to long-term gains: "Having youth cooperate early will lead to them working together throughout their lives."

3. Keeping a Client Focus

Policies and programs, particularly those for urban Aboriginal people, are intended to meet client needs. When designing and implementing policies and programs, those involved need to remain focused on the client. As an Aboriginal interviewee said, "You're doing it for the children. You can't forget who you're doing it for."

■ ***One person, one life at a time:*** Several respondents said that at-risk and in-need urban Aboriginal people are best served when the emphasis is on the individual rather than the big picture. When asked how organizations could help Aboriginal youth, a respondent replied, "One person, one life at a time." A municipal official echoed this sentiment: "In general, the most effective changes occur on a one on one basis." Many interviewees spoke of small programs and projects as being a good idea as they achieve meaningful results in people's lives – often quickly – and provide visible outcomes upon which to build further successes.

■ ***Develop a common vision:*** Both Aboriginal and government interviewees stated that it is imperative that all actors remember the reason for policy-making and programming for urban Aboriginal people: improved outcomes. As one Aboriginal interviewee said, it is about achieving "the best outcome for the client, not about building kingdoms," while another Aboriginal respondent said, "You have to keep focused on the one goal: service delivery to one client group." In turn, a health district official said that an important point is "developing a common vision and following it and keeping on the vision." In this way, the goal, the vision, and the objective become common – known and supported by all participants.

■ ***Status-blind programming:*** Although it is important to keep in mind that urban Aboriginal people are not a homogeneous group, programs and services that work – according to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interviewees – are those that do not discriminate among Aboriginal people with or without status under the Indian Act, Treaty or not, First Nation, Inuit, or Métis. In this regard, a provincial official stated, "By downplaying the differences between Aboriginal people we find we get somewhere," while an Aboriginal interviewee said, "Status, non-status, or Métis, it doesn't matter. We work as a community as a whole. We need to work for the interests of the Aboriginal community as a whole, not for specific groups." A municipal official added, "We're dealing with different cultures so there's strength in focusing on what unifies us as Aboriginal people rather than what separates us."

■ ***Cultural sensitivity:*** Cultural awareness and sensitivity have become accepted norms when approaching Aboriginal issues. However, interviewees identified that there are different types of cultural sensitivity, and one type is preferred over the others.

Understanding the role of history in shaping urban Aboriginal realities today is what many interviewees identified as being important. According to a municipal official, "Having Aboriginal awareness go beyond beads and feathers … makes a bigger difference than learning about Medicine Wheels." Another municipal official said, "The part that is important is cultural knowledge and cultural sensitivity in the sense of knowing Aboriginal history and the Indian Act and so on." In this regard, a non-Aboriginal police officer stated, "Residential schooling destroyed two generations of parenting skills. The third generation has no one to teach them parenting skills." An awareness and understanding of history leads to meaningful cultural sensitivity.

4. Considering Service Location Carefully

Several ideas that work with respect to locating services were identified in the interviews.

■ ***Close to clients:*** Several respondents spoke of the realities facing at-risk and in-need populations, including, as one person who works with Aboriginal youth said, the reality that "some Aboriginal youth don't have bus fare" to get to some existing facilities or programs. Some decision-makers have learned that services for at-risk and in-need urban Aboriginal people have to be located in the neighbourhoods in which these people live. As a health region official stated, services have to be "where the people are."

■ ***Networks of locations when necessary:*** Respondents often spoke of the need for multiple service locations because urban Aboriginal populations are dispersed within a city. Pockets of at-risk urban Aboriginal people are found in several neighbourhoods, necessitating several service locations.

■ ***One stop shopping:*** "One stop shopping" was a recurring theme among both Aboriginal and government respondents in cities that have experience with this sort of structure. By this, people were speaking of places where people in need could come in for more than one type of service because it is more convenient. In this regard, a non-Aboriginal youth worker stated, "people present with many needs."

One stop shopping also allows staff to refer clients to other services in the same building, sometimes by walking them down the hall. A health district official said that clients will "springboard through staff referrals." Knowing this, a decision was made to develop a multi-purpose facility around core recreation programming: "The intent was to create recreation opportunities for youth in the core area… Once a relationship and trust had developed with the kids, it could lead into health and other issues that would otherwise be ignored or unidentified."

Although the Aboriginal Centre in Winnipeg is often cited as an example of one stop shopping, it is not the only model. The White Buffalo Youth Lodge in Saskatoon, and the Vancouver Native Health Society's location on East Hastings, although neither as large nor hosting as many programs and services as the Winnipeg centre, are also forms of one stop shopping.

Another variant on the one stop shop is co-location of various departments of a government and different orders of government. Interviewees noted that co-location promotes relationship-building among public servants. In Winnipeg, according to a provincial official, the Aboriginal Single Window "has helped with a working relationship with the federal government, especially HRDC, that allows other things to come out of the partnership." This idea also is more convenient and efficient for clients seeking approval for project proposals. A federal official stated that the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative – another co-location effort – provides the "advantage of having everyone there. We can all look at a proposal. Does it make sense, does it fit the community program, how best can it be funded?"

■ ***Street-level, storefront operations:*** Many respondents, especially urban Aboriginal people, say that having services in street-level, storefront operations works for Aboriginal clients, as opposed to their having to go up an elevator in a government office tower.

5. Emphasizing Aboriginal Delivery

Among both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents who addressed the issue, the sentiment was unanimous: services for urban Aboriginal people work better when delivered by Aboriginal people. However, this is not to say that all interviewees believed that non-Aboriginal people or organizations could not provide services for urban Aboriginal people. As a federal official stated,

> *I think it is also important for non-Aboriginals to have a chance to work with Aboriginals with a common goal of making our communities better. In all instances, though, my experience is that if Aboriginals are in charge (i.e., are making decisions and oversee delivery) of service delivery, it better meets the needs of the client.*

According to one non-Aboriginal respondent, for non-Aboriginal people and organizations to successfully deliver services, they must accept certain realities: "Live the values and principles all the time.... You're not an Aboriginal agency ... not now and never will be."

In addition to delivery by Aboriginal people, many Aboriginal interviewees stressed the importance of Aboriginal control of the delivery organization. In the words of a respondent who works for an Aboriginal political organization, "You can't expect non-Aboriginals to meet the goals because they never lived the life." Aboriginal interviewees prefer not-for-profit Aboriginal organizations providing services that are funded by the public sector, and the reality is that very little urban Aboriginal programming occurs outside of the Alternative Service Delivery model.

■ ***Aboriginal clients seek familiar faces:*** Interviewees who were urban Aboriginal people frequently spoke of the importance of having Aboriginal people staffing the programs and services for urban Aboriginal people. But this opinion was not limited to Aboriginal people. According to a provincial government official, "More Aboriginal people will access health services if familiar faces are providing the services."

A public servant noted that governments often have two general types of clients with respect to urban Aboriginal programming, and the need for Aboriginal workers is different for each type. The first type is a person who is in-need and accesses services delivered by government workers; for example, an income assistance recipient. The second type is a client, such as an Aboriginal service delivery organization, that seeks programming funds in attempting to deliver services to urban Aboriginal people. While the first type strongly suggests a need for Aboriginal client service officers, the importance of this is somewhat diminished with respect to the second type. Much of this has to do with individual capacity and ability to deal in a non-Aboriginal environment.

■ ***Mistrust from past government actions:*** Aboriginal interviewees spoke forcefully of the impacts of past actions by non-Aboriginal governments and about how these actions continue to influence urban Aboriginal people today. The legacy of mistrust is transmitted inter-generationally, especially by and about residential school survivors. The result, as one interviewee said, is that there is "no trust between the Aboriginal world and the non-Aboriginal world so it has to be Aboriginal delivery."

This mistrust is a reality that must be addressed. Being aware of the mistrust and reasons for it can help public servants to better understand urban Aboriginal people. As a federal official stated, "While we are aware that past government actions have had a tremendously negative impact on Aboriginal Canadians, we are now trying to build a future of collaboration and partnership and we must overcome the old mistrust."

■ ***Non-Aboriginal clients will access Aboriginal-delivered services:*** Many interview subjects who work in service delivery capacities stated that non-Aboriginal clients facing hardships do access services delivered by Aboriginal people. According to the interview subjects who addressed the issue, at-risk and in-need non-Aboriginal people do not care whether their services are delivered by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal people and organizations.

A recurring theme among Aboriginal interviewees is that they do not want to be isolated from the larger community. As one Aboriginal respondent noted, "As much as the vision is all-Aboriginal, in urban settings we must be careful of creating apartheid situations." Aboriginal service delivery respondents often cited estimates of the percentage of clients who are non-Aboriginal yet access their services. A health region official echoed this sentiment by stating, "Aboriginal means everybody." For at least one government official, this translates into "ensuring that Aboriginal services are open to anyone."

6. Separating Politics from Program Delivery

Many respondents stated that keeping politics separate from program delivery is an idea that works. Interview subjects from both Aboriginal service delivery organizations and governments identified this as critically important to success.

- ***Work with the service delivery community on services and with politicians on politics:*** This is a theme that recurred often. Interview subjects from Aboriginal service delivery organizations frequently stressed that programming discussions with public servants worked only when the Aboriginal participants were all drawn from the service delivery community. As one Aboriginal interviewee stated, "Keep politics out of social service delivery." According to a federal government official, the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative "worked because it was community groups rather than political groups."

All the same, interview subjects from Aboriginal political organizations spoke of the importance of recognition, by public servants and non-Aboriginal politicians, of their roles within urban Aboriginal communities. Political organizations play important roles in providing a voice for urban Aboriginal issues and as a point of contact with urban Aboriginal communities. Neither of these roles, however, involves nor necessitates service delivery.

- ***Avoid morphing service organizations into political organizations and vice versa:*** Interview subjects from service delivery organizations spoke very strongly of the importance of keeping roles separated. The message that came through is that governments have to be clear about the intentions of funding decisions: if a policy decision is made to build capacity among political organizations, then do so through core funding, not by encouraging, however unintentionally, political organizations to chase programming dollars. When political organizations apply to deliver programs, governments should try to find an existing service organization instead. Likewise, governments should fund service delivery organizations to deliver services, not to be lobbyists or politicians or policy analysts.

Respondents stated that the morphing of organizations from one purpose to another happens in response to government actions. A service delivery organization that does not get the ear of governments may change into a political organization; in the words of a federal official, "Aboriginal organizations go political when things don't go exactly as they want." Similarly, a political organization often will go into the "program delivery business" to access government funding.

- ***Limit programming discussions:*** One strategy that works to keep politics separate from program delivery is to limit the scope of discussions between Aboriginal organizations and governments. According to a municipal government official, "You have to be very specific about what you're doing or else you bump into First Nation Treaty concerns.... Focus on a specific program in a specific site.... Keep it project-specific." In this way, politics – especially intra-Aboriginal politics – can be avoided.

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR GOVERNMENTS

1. Listening to the Community

Three themes emerged from the interviews with respect to the need for governments to listen to urban Aboriginal communities.

- ***Respect Aboriginal planning and processes:*** Members of urban Aboriginal communities conceived many of the successful projects described by interviewees. As a result, some respondents believe that community development approaches and engaging the community as partners are ideas worth emulating; as a federal public servant said, the "community development approach is most successful." When asked what lesson could be given to colleagues, the response was, "build on existing Aboriginal organizations and what they are doing."

Interviewees cited examples in which Aboriginal involvement in policy and program design has occurred and is occurring, with what they view as good results. For example, the "Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle" initiative in Calgary is perceived as being legitimized in large part through its having been based on traditional Aboriginal decision-making processes. In the words of a municipal official, "the community was involved in a fundamental way throughout all stages of the initiative, and has remained the central focus of the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative" as it moves to implement the recommendations of the Listening Circles.

■ ***Work with the community agenda:*** Interviewees stated that the community usually knows the issues better than public servants or politicians, so the latter should act on the community's issues. For example, a federal public servant stated that in Saskatoon, "rather than overlording and pushing the federal agenda, we worked with the community's agenda." Likewise in Calgary, when federal public servants let the community take the lead, an effective structure and process emerged. Interview subjects often connected the need to work with the community agenda with Aboriginal involvement in policy and program design: the community takes the lead in identifying issues of importance and is also an active participant in designing responses and solutions to the issues.

■ ***Consider Aboriginal community leaders as peers:*** More than a few Aboriginal interviewees stated that they had years of experience as public servants before redirecting their careers towards working in their communities, and argued that they should be valued by public servants for their experience and knowledge. As an Aboriginal interviewee stated, community leaders "bring community acceptance, legitimacy, wisdom, and, increasingly, a capacity to deliver" to partnerships with governments. A provincial official offered another view in noting that Aboriginal community leaders offer public servants "a partner with a finger on the pulse at street level."

2. Approaching Issues Holistically

This promising practice is summarized by the words of a federal official who said, "We have to work more holistically."

■ ***Break down the silos:*** Governments have traditionally operated with a silo mentality: departments addressing only those issues within their tightly constructed mandates and doing so in isolation. This approach is foreign to that traditionally adopted by Aboriginal people. An Aboriginal interviewee stated, "The silo management process is contrary to Aboriginal community ideas," as Aboriginal communities take a holistic approach to issues and look for holistic solutions. More recently, however, an awakening to alternatives to silo management has started to take hold in governments.

A federal government official identified that at the Saskatoon Community Partnership Table, "the federal government is coming as a horizontal organization rather than line departments." Referring to the Alberta government's *Aboriginal Policy Framework* and subsequent cross-ministry *Aboriginal Policy Initiative*, one official stated, "The adoption of cross-ministry initiatives has accelerated the demise of the silo mentality in government operations."

Regional Intersectoral Committees, established by the Saskatchewan government, are, according to a provincial official, "primarily about integration of human services delivery" and provide a structure and process for coordination among provincial, federal, and municipal departments, other local authorities such as school boards and health districts, and community-based service delivery agencies. The Committees "see client needs as multi-faceted and approach them holistically."

■ ***Partner with others:*** Many interviewees spoke of the importance of partnerships: among departments of the same government, among governments, and among sectors. An Aboriginal respondent stated, "Find a way to bring about meaningful partnerships. Don't work unilaterally or on assumptions. Find common solutions based on partnership." In the words of a federal official, "We don't need to work in the isolation we have, we need to work with other orders of government."

Interviewees identified working examples of partnerships, such as the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre, described by a provincial official as "a partnership between the Manitoba Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Centre, the City of Winnipeg, Province of Manitoba, and Government of Canada." A federal government official stated that the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative has promise because of "strong support from three levels of government, the private sector, and the community." As well, an Aboriginal interviewee stated, "As an Aboriginal development model, [the Winnipeg Core area Initiative] is a good one because we can't deal with the issue in isolation. Many partners should be in the exercise. It should not be an exclusive Aboriginal focus."

Partnerships with the private sector cannot be overlooked. According to an Aboriginal interviewee, the Aboriginal Sector Council is "a unique partnership among corporate, Aboriginal, and government leaders in Canada to focus on the full

participation of Aboriginal people in Canada's economy." The Saskatchewan government's Aboriginal Employment Development Program facilitates partnerships among employers, labour unions, post-secondary institutions, and Aboriginal communities to encourage greater employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. Another private-public partnership discussed in the interviews is the Business Council of Manitoba's Aboriginal Post-Secondary Awards Program, which works because, in the words of a non-Aboriginal interviewee, "Everybody is heading in the same direction."

■ ***Common bowl:*** One practical and highly visible means to implement partnering is illustrated by the Aboriginal metaphor of a common bowl, in which everyone puts in what they can and takes out what they need. A municipal government official identified how a similar idea is contributing to success: "Everyone at the table has an equal voice regardless of the resources they bring.... It takes away the animosity and disagreements."

According to some interviewees, this type of idea was behind the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative, which a federal government official said worked because of "a central pot of money" that was funded by three orders of government in partnership. An Aboriginal interviewee added that Initiative staff would "bring together resources from many programs" to fund projects. In Saskatchewan, funding for initiatives approved by Regional Intersectoral Committees comes, according to a provincial official, "through a pooling of money."

3. Allowing Flexibility

Flexibility in policy implementation and program design is important. Interview subjects - particularly Aboriginal people - stressed the need for more flexibility, both within governments and in how governments approach urban Aboriginal communities.

Repeatedly, interviewees stated that when governments allow flexibility, the results are favourable. At the same time, several respondents spoke strongly of the negative consequences of inflexible policies and programs, as "kids fall through the cracks because of a lack of flexibility."

■ ***Community-designed initiatives:*** Many respondents mentioned that community-designed programs work much better than "cookie cutter" programs originating in departmental headquarters. According to a municipal government official, "it really comes down to not trying to fit a government's set of rules around a local issue," while a federal official stated that success in urban Aboriginal projects requires a "willingness to be flexible." Many interviewees mentioned the federal Homelessness Initiative as an example of a program that allows community-designed solutions.

An important lesson that was learned by some respondents is the need to sometimes substitute local preferences for headquarters directives. A municipal official said, "Instead of spending time on protocol, take an issue and deal with it; the processes will evolve."

■ ***Administrative requirements:*** One area where flexibility works particularly well, according to both Aboriginal and governmental sources, is in administrative requirements. On the one hand, Aboriginal people identified that their idea of flexibility in accountability standards differs from that held by governments. On the other hand, government sources identified instances where flexible guidelines resulted in relationships that worked and outcomes that were perceived as being positive. According to one provincial government official, "Local needs should outweigh bureaucratic requirements.... Be flexible about rules and regulations. They're good to have but you need room." A municipal official stated, "Formal MOU [Memoranda of Understanding] have to be abandoned." Speaking about the Winnipeg Core Area initiative, an Aboriginal respondent said, "Many good projects don't fit existing program criteria and are lost.... Core saved these types of programs because of the very wide enabling documents."

■ ***Discretionary funding:*** Discretionary funding, which allows flexibility and independence in how money is spent, was identified as a very good idea. One example of discretionary funding that was identified as working is the Alberta government's Aboriginal Health Strategy Project Fund. One official stated that the discretionary aspect of the Fund allows funding of "pilot projects that would not otherwise be approved." In the words of that official, "Every department needs discretionary funds built into its Business Plan for Aboriginal initiatives.... In the Business Plan, you need a line that says, 'To do Aboriginal [fill in the blank] stuff, whether it's Health or Justice or whatever'."

- ***Work the system and think outside the box:*** Some public servants identified that sometimes creative "working" of the system by public servants was a good way to inject flexibility into seemingly inflexible structures, while a provincial government official stated that "working outside the box" was the Deputy Minister's mantra within their department.

According to some interviewees, the federal Homelessness Initiative has worked in Calgary because of the efforts of public servants. According to one, the success came from "HRDC staff trying hard to understand what the local Aboriginal community wanted to do and working the system to see how it could be done." Although the solutions were reported to have been creative, they were also said to have complied with all government requirements.

Some interviewees identified a similar success with the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative as "staff worked the system.... They had enough flexibility to do what was required. A mandated, funded, freed-up agency was used." In Vancouver, a federal official stated:

> *We stretched the envelope and thought "out of the box" and that is what is needed in urban settings. National policies and terms and conditions are often an impediment for regional managers in the federal government and that should be understood in Ottawa and much more flexibility is needed for the regions to provide services that meet the needs of the people here, not based on needs in Ottawa or other regions.*

4. Simplifying Application Processes

One issue frequently mentioned by Aboriginal community workers is the many frustrations associated with applying for government funding. A federal government official identified one of the reasons when he said, "Community-based organizations – particularly urban Aboriginal – do not have the capacity to write proposals, do external research into alternative funding mechanisms, [and therefore] do not do well in a Request for Proposal environment." However, some government actors are doing things to improve the situation.

- ***Assist applicants in preparing applications:*** Some public servants have found ways to assist clients to prepare their applications. Staff members of the Alberta Aboriginal Health Strategy Project Fund, for example, assist clients with their applications early in – and throughout – the process, including providing early feedback on proposals and steering clients away from unfundable proposals. According to a provincial government official, "The idea is to not have Aboriginal organizations or communities working on proposals that will not be funded." Some Aboriginal interviewees related stories of individual public servants at various levels taking the initiative to make similar efforts. Both public servants and Aboriginal people state that doing so results in less frustration for applicants, much improved relationships with clients, and higher rates of successful applications. Similarly, according to an Aboriginal interviewee, staff of the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative "would do the legwork on funding proposals for organizations."

- ***Spend time with the clients:*** Public servants who spend time away from their desks and in the community, meeting with their clients, report that doing so "makes a huge difference.... It makes their job easier, makes our job easier," and improves outcomes. These public servants assist their clients by training them on completing Requests for Proposals and applications, and offering sample documents. Reviewing applications with clients early in the process is seen to be very efficient: "Don't waste their time by making them send a report that doesn't meet the criteria.... Down the line, this will save everybody a lot of time, money, and resources."

5. Recognizing the Importance of Urban Aboriginal Issues

In response to internal and external stimuli, several governments have recognized the importance of Aboriginal issues, including urban Aboriginal issues.

- ***Government structures:*** Some governments recognize the importance of Aboriginal issues through the restructuring of departments to create ministries with responsibilities for Aboriginal affairs. Each of the Manitoba and Alberta governments have Ministries responsible for Aboriginal Affairs; the British Columbia government recently restructured its ministries to create an Aboriginal Directorate that has largely a programmatic focus and a Treaty Office that deals with more long-term issues; and, in its recent reorganization, the Saskatchewan government recognized the nature of its

relationships with Aboriginal people by creating a Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs department. Structuring government departments so that the importance of Aboriginal issues is recognized is, in the words of a provincial government official, "pretty fundamental."

■ ***Policy frameworks:*** Recognition of Aboriginal issues is also happening at the process level. Many governments have crafted policy documents intended to guide all government actions in addressing Aboriginal issues. The Alberta and Saskatchewan governments, for example, have Aboriginal policy frameworks that require departments to work together to develop means by which to achieve policy goals. In the words of a provincial official, doing so "focuses efforts, raises consciousness, and increases awareness."

6. Cooperating Nationally and Regionally

As both the importance of urban Aboriginal issues and government awareness of those issues have increased, so too has the need for intergovernmental coordination. Several vehicles for governments to communicate at the highest levels have been implemented recently. In part because governments are communicating with one another, ways of moving beyond jurisdictional impasses have been possible.

■ ***Intergovernmental efforts:*** Regular Federal-Provincial-Territorial Meetings of Ministers Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and Leaders of National Aboriginal Organizations, as well as meetings and other communications among departmental officials in support of the ministerial meetings, provide a venue for the coordination and exchange of information.

At the western regional level, Ministers responsible for Aboriginal Affairs met formally for the first time in May 2002. Deputy Ministers also met at the same time. Among the major agenda items at both meetings were urban Aboriginal issues. The western Ministers process allows provincial governments to compare notes on strategies, policies, and spending priorities – and to compare western priorities to those of the federal government. Following their meeting, western Ministers requested that urban Aboriginal issues be placed on the agenda for the November 2002 Federal-Provincial-Territorial Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and Leaders of National Aboriginal Organizations.

Also at the western regional level, municipal officials with responsibilities for urban Aboriginal programming meet once per year. These meetings, with representatives of major cities, provide a forum for municipalities to exchange information and to coordinate efforts with respect to urban Aboriginal issues.

Together, these processes show that federal, provincial, and municipal government leaders are communicating on urban Aboriginal issues.

■ ***Moving beyond jurisdiction:*** Legislative authority and policy and programming responsibility with respect to urban Aboriginal people are unclear and contentious. In the past, disagreements have resulted in policy and programming gaps. More recently, however, governments have found ways to avoid jurisdictional confrontations. The federal government was a full partner in the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative, for example. The reason for strong federal involvement in municipal affairs – an area of provincial jurisdiction – was because, according to a federal official, a federal Minister "wasn't going to let jurisdiction get in the way." Similar approaches have resulted in multipartite agreements involving combinations of federal, provincial, municipal, and Aboriginal organizations. This approach is working because, in the words of a provincial government official, "If jurisdiction is your starting point, you're not going to solve anything.... Start from a community issues standpoint, set aside jurisdictional and policy issues, and commit some resources to it. You'll see things happen."

CONCLUSION

This report has been rather general in the ideas it identifies as promising practices. Further, little or no attempt has been made to give a step-by-step guide to implementing these ideas. The reason for this is simple: as has been a theme throughout many of the promising practices, it is for local people to apply some or all of these ideas as best they can. For this report to be any more specific would be contrary to much that has been learned.

It is therefore for people engaged in urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming to decide which of these promising practices are most relevant to their circumstances. Nevertheless, the report is a valuable contribution to policy-making and programming for several reasons. First, the report identifies that successes are dependent on

a combination of many factors. Second, readers are reminded that local solutions are much preferred over "cookie cutter" approaches. Third, important ideas have been identified that contribute to successful policy-making and programming.

Very likely the most important idea in this report is the role that trust plays. Trust is fragile: easily damaged if people are careless; once damaged, difficult and time consuming to repair. Yet trust is also strong and resilient if treated properly. In these ways, trust is much like a spider web. It takes time to build and takes time to repair. But to a spider, it is well worth the effort.

1. Issues for Further Research

This report raises some issues for further research. First, this report has been a qualitative identification of promising practices. Now that this task is completed, actors involved in urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming need to build the quantitative data that will allow for evaluations of policies and programming to assess what is working and what is not.

Second, the research for this report shows that real constraints exist with respect to public servant independence. Many public servants hesitate to think outside the box, somewhat understandably, for fear of being reprimanded. While entrepreneurial public servants find ways around constraints, there are - and should be - limits. One concern is that flexibility of the kind identified in this report could be abused and lead to fraud. However, without flexibility, the kind of innovative policy-making and programming that are needed will go undone. Therefore, a thoughtful piece of work, perhaps by a provincial or federal Auditor General or an outside organization, is needed in addressing the complex accountability issues raised by flexibility.

Third, long-held conventions contribute much of the silo mentality and inflexibility in governments. A practical challenge is ensuring that Ministers are accountable for how public funds are spent while allowing flexible, cross-ministry initiatives. Another area for further research, therefore, is to examine alternatives to the traditional vertical accountability model. The alternatives should not call into question the fundamentals of ministerial accountability but rather identify ways to emphasize horizontality and flexibility within the existing system.

Fourth, the need for funding exhibited by Aboriginal political organizations in choosing to pursue program spending suggests strongly a need for research into alternative funding mechanisms for these organizations, including an examination of own source revenues.

2. Next Steps

Addressing urban Aboriginal issues will be a long-term process. However, it is worth doing; although it will take time and although progress will seem incremental, successes will accumulate to impressive results. If Canadians, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, do not engage in this worthwhile activity, what are the possible consequences? We will be wasting human lives and public tax dollars.

Many of the promising practices in this report may seem like common sense, which raises the question: Why are they not common? If decision-makers give full consideration to some or all of these ideas, then future urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming will be more promising. ■

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P.O. Box 6572 Station D
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E4
Telephone: 403.264.9535

www.cwf.ca